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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a brief introduction to the principles underlying Charles Fillmore's case grammar, contrasts it with other approaches to grammar, and suggests ways in which case grammar could be used in the language arts curriculum. Examples of the transparencies to which the text refers are included. (AA)

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CASE GRAMMAR AND THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM?

No facet of the language arts curriculum appears to be less popular with elementary school teachers than grammar. Surveys conducted by my colleagues, and by students in graduate classes I teach, provide fairly conclusive evidence that most teachers dislike teaching grammar and spend less time with this facet of the language arts than any other. They tend to rely heavily on textbook exercises, perhaps through insecurity, and tend to give little consideration to the theoretical assumptions or concepts upon which the textbook material is based. Instruction is more often related to questions of usage rather than grammar. Those of us who teach language arts courses at the pre-service and in-service levels must accept some responsibility for this set of circumstances. We don't enjoy dealing with grammar either! It's especially gratifying, therefore, to find a group of this size interested in and concerned about this topic. If our language is important, and most of us think it is, it is probably important to have some fundamental knowledge about its structure and operation. To contribute just a bit to this knowledge is one of the purposes of this session.

In the next few minutes we're going to discuss grammar, beginning with a brief overview of three approaches to grammatical analysis: traditional, structural and transformational. Case

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grammar will be described in some detail. Case grammar has been classified as both a subset and an extension of transformational grammar, and it represents a view of the structure of American English which many linguists believe holds more promise, in theory and in application, than its predecessors. Three teaching examples will be suggested, two dealing with reading comprehension, one with composition.

It is probably helpful, perhaps obligatory, to provide a definition of grammar which can serve as a foundation for the rest of my remarks. Although the definition provided by Nelson Francis is not new, it does make some important distinctions regarding the several meanings attached to the term: He writes:

> "The first thing we mean by "grammar" is 'the set of formal patterns in which the words of a language are arranged in order to convey larger meanings. It is not necessary that we be able to discuss these patterns self consciously in order to be able to use them. In fact, all speakers of any language above the age of five know how to use its complex forms of organization with considerable skill, in this sense of the word - call it 'Grammar 1' - they are thoroughly familiar with its grammar.
>
> The second meaning of 'grammar' - call it Grammar 2 - is the branch of linguistic science which is concerned with the description, analysis, and formulization of formal language patterns. . .grammar, in the first sense, was in operation before anyone formulated the first rule that began the history of grammar as a study.

> The third sense in which people use the word 'grammar' is 'linguistic etiquette'. This we may call 'Grammar 3'. The word in this sense is often coupled with a derogatory adjective; the expression 'He ain't there' is 'bad grammar'. What we mean is that such an expression is bad linguistic manners, in certain circles." Francis concludes: "These, then, are the three meanings of grammar: Grammar 1, a form of behavior; Grammar 2, a field of study, a science; and Grammar 3, a branch of etiquette (Francis, in Allen, 1964, Pp. 69,70).

Elementary teachers probably have an obligation to recognize the pervasive nature of Grammar 1, to become well acquainted with the findings implicit in Grammar 2, and to avoid using Grammar 3, usage, as a punitive device with pupils or as an entrance requirement to a club so exclusive that most adults, English teachers not excepted, would not qualify for membership. We will <u>not</u> be dealing with Grammar 3 in the next few minutes, but with Grammar 1 and 2.

Most of us recall grammar lessons which emphasized the memorization of parts of speech and their definitions, diagramming sentences and selecting the appropriate 'slot-filler': "Choose is or are, was or were". Traditional grammar has been criticized on several counts. It fails to describe its operations with any consistency, it depends upon some understanding of terms such as parts of speech before real study of the components of a sentence can begin, and it tends to be <u>prescriptive</u> rather <u>descriptive</u>. Traditional grammarians describe English

with great detail, although from a prescriptive perspective, and this is probably necessary, since traditionalists must work from specific sentences and cannot help in the development of principles for the organization of sentences not yet spoken or written.

The structural grammarian according to Ralph Goodman, "arms to produce a systematic analysis of sentences that have been spoken or written by native speakers of English". (Goodman, in Stageberg, 1971, P. 291.) That is, patterns, whether three, four, five, or ten, are provided as models for the analysis of existing sentences. Structural grammar is based upon spoken sentences in American English, and for this reason, if no other, it represents a step forward from traditional, latinate grammars. It is not the purpose of instruction in structural grammar to teach children to decompose sentences more efficiently or to force them to memorize definitions of parts of speech. Structural grammars have been criticized for overemphasis on oral language at the expense of written and for working with units no larger than the sentence. As Robinson notes, "Sentences are a rather small part of language. Chomsky never gives any account of paragraphs, chapters, books, or any of the larger units of which sentences are a kind of atom. But it is the larger unit which decides what the sentence is doing in language, not vice versa." (Robinson, 1975, P. 45).

Perhaps the major contrastive feature between structural grammar and transformational grammar is the fact that transformational grammar is generative. That is, it provides rules for producing new sentences as well as patterns for the analysis of existing sentences. The term transformational refers to the

division of American English sentences into two categories or classifications: (1) basic or kernel sentences and (2) the transforms or variations of these basic sentences. The basic, or kernel sentence is composed of two parts, the noun phrase and the verb phrase. A series of rewrite rules explains the transformations from statement to question, or from an active to a passive sentence.

Case grammar achieved prominence with the publication in 1968 of a paper entitled "A Case for Case" written by Charles Fillmore. Suzette Elgin (Mimeographed Material and personal correspondence, 1977) refers to case grammar as 'a subdivision' of transformational grammar. It might also be thought of as an extension of transformational grammar, just as transformational grammar can be thought of as building upon the findings and analyses of structural grammarians. There are differences of opinion among various transformational grammarians and not all supporters or proponents of case grammar view it in the same way. One important belief held in common by case grammarians is that language study cannot be divorced from semantics, the study of meaning. They also maintain that both structuralists and transformationalists take an atomistic view of language, ignoring the whole and stressing the parts. The part, for the structuralist, is the sound unit, the phoneme, and, for the transformationalist, the rules governing the combination and alteration of sentence parts.

The description of a sentence as being comprised of a noun phrase and verb phrase says too little about the relationships between these elements. Fillmore contends that "the sentence in its basic structure consists of a verb and one or more noun phrases,

each associated with the verb in a particular case relationship" (Fillmore, 1968, P. 21.) Note that the verb is central, the noun peripheral, in case grammars. He describes a sentence as consisting of a modality and a proposition. The term proposition refers to a set of relationships involving nouns and verbs; modality refers to such factors as tense, mood, and negative. He suggests a basic group of cases as follows: [Transparency here].

1. Agentive (A); the case of the typically animate perceived instigator of the action.

   Bob ran all the way home.

2. Instrumental (I); the case of the inanimate force or object causally involved in the action or state identified by the verb.

   Tim won the game with a basket in the final seconds.

3. Dative (D); the case of the animate being affected by the state or action identified by the verb.

   Ellen was sure she would be elected class president.

4. Factitive (F); the case of the object or being resulting from the action or state identified by the verb, or understood as part of the meaning of the verb.

   His father's death changed Robert's career plans.

5. Locative (L); the case which identifies the location or spatial orientation of the state or action identified by the verb.

   She's gone to school.

6. Objective (O); the semantically most neutral case, the case of anything representable by a noun whose role in the action or state identified by the verb is identified by the semantic interpretation of the verb itself.

   He totaled the car. (Fillmore, 1968, P.25)

Roger Brown adds to this list (and so have most other recent students of case grammar!):

1. Patient - something or someone either in a given state or suffering a change of state.

   His cold is much worse today.

2. Beneficiary - someone who profits from a state in process, including possession.

   Mary Ann earned a good grade.

3. Experiencer - someone having a given experience or mental disposition.

   Susan is feeling very depressed.

4. Complement - the verb names an action that brings something into existence.

   They played bridge. (Brown, 1973)

Why so much emphasis on the verb? First, because verbs are present in all languages, except for a few marginal utterances. Second, because it is the verb that determines what the rest of the sentence will be like.

It's interesting to note that Elgin warns us not to ask pupils to locate the subject of a sentence. She notes that English has two kinds of subjects, one determined by position and one by meaning. In a sentence like 'The window broke', the window is not the agent, the

instrument, or the experiencer. The subject is implied. 'Window' qualifies as subject only by virtue of its position. In our language, something or someone must sit in the noun phrase subject position.

What are the instructional possibilities, or what is the pedagogical potential of case grammar? Perhaps, like James Moffett, (1968, Pp. 155, 156) you take the position that instruction in grammar, any kind of grammar, at the elementary school level, is inappropriate and counterproductive. Certainly I would agree with Moffett that no case can be made for case - or any other approach to instruction in grammar - on the basis of resulting improvement in speech and writing. However, if a decision is made to include language study, grammar, as part of the language arts curriculum, case grammar has much merit (in my opinion, at least). The terms Agent, Instrument, and Locative (or location) can be understood without undue difficulty. These terms can easily be used as basic elements of questions to check children's comprehension of a reading selection. [Transparency one here]

For example, what is the agent in the first sentence? (He, I). What is the instrument in the second sentence? (There isn't one; subject is animate.) Locative or Location in the second sentence? (out from under the bed). This selection is written at approximately second grade level; checks other than the knowledge level checks suggested here are obviously advisable. Nevertheless, it does seem that identification of agent, instrument, and location are appropriate as part of the work done to advance pupils comprehension skills. [Transparency two here] (Questions similar to those asked about text selection.)

Further, case grammar techniques can help older children in the analysis of their written, and perhaps, oral, compositions. [Transparency three here] (Questions concerning agent, instrument, and location) Utilization

of case grammar techniques would at least partially avoid the problems identified by Hunt (1970) and Moffett (1968). Since sentence combining and embedding are not taught in a case grammar approach to composition, nor stressed as desireable elements in "mature" writing there is no effort to convince children that longer (or more complex) is better!

Because of the role given semantics, because units larger than the sentence are utilized, and because the verb assumes a central position in the grammatical analysis, case grammar appears to have considerable promise as an approach to helping children discover more about the structure of their language. Classroom applications have yet to be clarified - only three possibilities have been suggested here. Linguistic analyses based upon relationships among and between sentence parts appears to be rational, at least as rational as (and likely to be more productive than), requiring the memorization of parts of speech, filling 'slots' in workbook exercises and matching assigned sentences to predetermined sentence pattern examples. Case grammar in the Elementary School Language Arts Curriculum? I say it's worth a try!

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"He has something under here, but I can't see what it is," said Betty. She came out from under the bed. Then she rose with Tag barking in her arms.

"He has his bone," said Rita.

"He has his bone," said Betty. "But he has something blue!"

"He has my ring!" said Rita. "Tag has my ring. This time, I did not see what Tag had under HIS nose! Let me give him a big kiss."

Transparency two

Vanessa Job
Mrs. Langell
Rm. 17, Grade 6
School 22

The Bat's Adventure

One night a bat from the country decided he would go into the city to get some food. Because was a Vampire Bat, he drank blood instead of eating insects like other bats did. There was a shortage of food in the country because there were so many bats and very few people, which didn't last long, so he came to the city.

The first thing he met were some telephone wires. He thought the telephone pole was a tree and swerved to get around it but ran into the wires. He broke a wing but could still fly.

He flew home to get well. While he was in the hospital, they fed him insects. He decided they were pretty good and he would eat them instead of drinking blood. He kicked his habit!

CASE GRAMMAR CATEGORIES

Fillmore:

1. Agentive (A) The case of the typically animate perceived instigator of the action.

   (Bob ran all the way home.)

2. Instrument (I) The case of the inanimate force or object causally involved in the action or state identified by the verb.

   (Tim won the game with a basket in the final seconds.)

3. Dative (D) The case of the animate being affected by the state or action identified by the verb.

   (Ellen was sure she would be elected class president.)

4. Factitive (F) The case of the object or being resulting from the action or state identified by the verb or understood as part of the meaning of the verb.

   (His father's death changed Robert's career plans.)

5. Locative (L) The case which identifies the location or spatial orientation of the state or action identified by the verb.

   (She's gone to school.)

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